

PEIHSF Semi-Annual Meeting (Oct.23, 2018)

World Café Discussions — Summary

*Student needs are growing and becoming more complex.
Resources given to schools have not grown to meet the needs of students adequately.*

Q1: What are the 'hot topic' items for your local Home and School?

- **Availability of non-academic supports**
 - E.g., mental health supports/staffing; curriculum/programming around wellness/wellbeing Gr.K-12
- **Learning resources**
 - Resource allotment (How is it decided? Inconsistent across schools)
 - Out-of-date texts/ books in poor repair
 - Online textbooks vs. hard copy (virtual texts do not support learning at home)
 - School spaces under-performing/ under-utilized (e.g., school library)
- **School day**
 - Bussing: logistics, length of time on bus, students late for classes, lost instructional time
 - Schedules (differences in start/end time across schools, length/number of recesses/breaks, classes too long at high school level)
- **Classes**
 - Composition (sizes too large for optimal learning, various learning levels within classroom challenging)
 - Need to teach to different learning styles, instead of just subject
 - Homework inconsistency from grade to grade, school to school, teacher to teacher
 - Consistent assignment of manageable homework load
- **School communications**
 - From school/board to parents/guardians/community (e.g., sudden school closures)
 - Communication with educators—e.g., getting ongoing feedback about child's needs/progress
 - Transparency in decision-making (e.g., teacher/administrator student selection process for leadership opportunities, bursaries, etc.)
 - Consent (students and parents need to be more informed)
- **School food**
 - Still a lot of inconsistency school-to-school; students should have more input into choice

General challenges (local level)

- **Engagement:** How to create a more community-type H&S relationship (teachers, administrators, students, parents/guardians, etc.)
- **Fundraising:** What are the guidelines? Who is responsible for what (school/board vs. H&S)?
- **Communication** between local Home & Schools
 - Need increased communication to share ideas, best practices, success stories, lessons learned, what works/what doesn't, specific policies/approaches, etc.

Q2: What are your biggest challenges in navigating the P.E.I. school system?

- **Working *with* the schools/ administration/ school board**
 - School administration turnover
 - Communications:
 - Home & School Facebook page vs. School Facebook page
 - There should only be one!
 - Dealing with issues of authority (knowing what H&S has the authority to do)

- **Access to information**
 - Especially for parents new to the school system
 - Parents new to Canada, as well as to P.E.I. (from other Canadian provinces)
 - Parents with first child entering Gr.K, or entering a new school
 - Parents “don’t know what they don’t know...”
 - Presumption that people can navigate the system, find resources on their own (e.g., special services/supports)
 - Need formal ways to train parents in navigating the school system
 - Ideas: School tours, ‘navigation’ resources (that keep in mind language barriers and other issues of accessibility, such as literacy levels), Home & School resources/information that are accessible
 - Current supports for accessing information: Shirley/PEIHSF; local H&S execs/presidents; good school administrators
 - Specific navigational challenges (with respect to information/communication):
 - Advancing students who are not working at grade level (how/why are decisions made?)
 - School assessments
 - Access to psychological/ educational assessments
 - Wait list for testing too long
 - Support for parents—what questions to ask/ who to ask (if child has a learning disability or other diagnosis that affects learning)?
 - Resource allocation: types and quality of learning resources, system of allocation

*Everyone in the school system should act as a ‘conciierge’
(i.e., if someone comes to them with a question, they know the answer,
or know how to point them in the right direction...)*

Q3: How can the PEIHSF continue to support school communities?

- **Improve communications/ liaisons/ collaboration**
 - Between PEIHSF and locals
 - Training for locals: role of H&S; how to conduct a meeting; how do we show the value of being engaged?
 - Support with funding/fund-raising
 - Between locals
 - Partnership/networking forum for local execs (e.g., Facebook group)
 - Sharing lessons learned/ best practices (e.g., to engage parents)
 - Sharing resources (e.g., policies, strategies)
 - Between feeder schools
 - Idea: Joint meeting at end of year for local execs of feeder schools (with local exec of junior high/ high school)
 - Need to foster collaboration between parents/students/administrators in H&S
 - Programs often child-focused and not parent-focused
 - E.g., more social/family activities at school; community-centred events
- **Provide parents/guardians with better “situational awareness”**
 - i.e., awareness of the larger school/educational system, beyond the classroom

Ideas to improve parent/guardian awareness/skills:

- Mentorships between parents: local H&S to match incoming parents (to system/school) with experienced parents
 - Could be something as simple as providing a mentor “name & phone number”—mentee won’t necessarily use it, but know that resource is there if they have a question
- Formal process for welcoming new parents to our schools
 - E.g., School tours
 - Targeted approach for newcomer/immigrant populations-?
- ‘Plain language’ resource for navigation of school system
 - E.g., Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture (DEELC) and Public Schools Branch (PSB) ‘handbook’
 - Schematic/flow-chart of the P.E.I. Education System (DEELC components, PSB components, schools)
 - Who is responsible for what? Who do I go to with various questions/concerns/needs?
 - How things work, how parents can be involved in schools

- Resource(s) must accommodate varying English language/ literacy levels of parents/guardians
 - E.g., Available in print/on web; translated into different languages; information made available via in-person communications and/or audio or video
- Home & School documents/communications (plain language/ translated/ accommodate various literacy levels)
- Training for parents on how to advocate for students
- Access to feedback mechanisms (for parents to provide feedback to H&S; administrators/teachers)

We need to advocate for more consistency throughout, and across, schools...

- **Continue to work on food nutrition, food policy**
 - More advocacy for healthy foods in all schools; spread the message
 - Advocate at grassroot level to keep kids at school during lunch
- **More transparency & involvement in decision-making**
 - How resources are allocated
 - Access to, and availability of, enrichment opportunities (e.g., participation in science fairs, availability of art classes, leadership opportunities, etc.)
 - How are students selected for...bursaries, leadership opportunities, special school groups?
 - Increase parent and student involvement in decision-making
- **Hot Topics (*revisited in Q3 discussions*)**
 - Challenges with bussing; need better bussing—more effective/logical routes
 - Large class sizes
 - Multi-level classes (how do we teach effectively to multiple learning levels?)
 - Better school libraries: need to increase access to librarians/resources they can offer; more focus on improving the libraries to encourage reading
 - Review of text materials (e.g., Information Technology textbook from 1995 at high school level)
 - Start/end time of school day, recesses (number/length)
 - Homework loads